Lateral

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Editors' Introduction

by Yumi Pak, Robert F. Carley, Eero Laine, SAJ, Alyson K. Spurgas and Chris Alen Sula | Issue 14.2 (Fall 2025)

ABSTRACT Reflecting on editorial labor, this introduction considers how the work of cultural studies can be furthered through community, amplification, and world-building. Advancing a curatorial, developmental model in contrast to a gatekeeping one, we consider what a horizontal approach to editing looks like in practice.

KEYWORDS cultural studies, curation, labor, publishing

Lateral operates through the labor of a team of editors who convene virtually each month. We gather from our respective living rooms and offices, the work desk that holds proofs that need re-reading, essays that need grading, the dining table from which all the clutter of eating has been temporarily removed. We meet and talk shop, discuss submissions and potential reviewers, the divvying up of tasks to make sure that we continue publishing. And too: the checking in about how things are going for each of us. The shared anxiety over draconian laws < https://www.chronicle.com/article/texas-a-m-system-sharply-restricts-how-faculty-can-teach-about-race-and-gender> limiting our ability to speak on structures of power, which are always structures of violence. The shared pleasure over a conference < https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SnnMRj7pdNAPKtg6f_tQRk_w23wLy_8y/edit> completed earlier in the spring, where several of us gathered in person—some of us meeting for the first time offline!—and missed the ones who couldn't be there. Our numbers fluctuate. Sometimes new editors join us, and at others,

some take their leave. A new editor of our "Years in Cultural Studies < https://csalateral.org/years/> " started her appointment this year; our two book editors shared news of their imminent departure. Our copyeditor is sorely missed while she is away.

The commitment that binds us in the pursuit of what cultural studies makes possible in the world, and what cultural studies does in the world, is one that centers a related question: what is an editor meant to make possible in the world? In Black studies, the role of the editor holds historical significance. From W. E. B. Du Bois as the editor of *The Crisis* to Lorraine A. Williams at *The Journal of Negro History* and Mary Ann Shadd Cary at *Provincial Freeman,* to those lesser known—or unknown—who edited manuscripts by earlier, forgotten Black writers and championed special issues of numerous academic journals, to Toni Morrison who brought the writings of Gayl Jones, Huey P. Newton, and June Jordan, among so many others, into homes across the United States during her tenure as an editor at Random House < https://www.harpercollins.com/products/toni-at-random-dana-a-williams> , it has been understood that editorial work is, by definition, a collective work of community, amplification, and world-building.

In no way do we hold ourselves as equal to the individuals named here, nor do we intend to collapse cultural studies with Black studies, but we do benefit from the lessons they've left behind and continue to share. We take seriously the responsibility with which all editors are charged: editing is a practice of curating knowledge for larger communities. We can argue that both editors and curators select materials and evaluate their "value" for larger consumption. What becomes troubling is that the language of "evaluation" also shades into the implicit—and explicit—territory of gatekeeping. Who gets to determine what or who is worthy of publishing? How might we instead imagine editing as a relationship of care, a careful reading of the scholarship of others as a response to their invitation to gather, and the extension of our own as informed by all those who have come before us, who are with us, who are yet to arrive? How might editing work to

challenge the economy of prestige that so pervades academia, rather than serving to reinforce it? Can it? During a monthly meeting, one of us asked, quite seriously, what publishing might look like if rather than striving for an acceptance rate in the single digits (an endeavor that none of us actually aspires to, to begin with), *Lateral* prioritizes a developmental approach rather than a gatekeeping one. Why is that not the aspiration of academic publishing? Why is the automatic assumption that editors at academic journals will be flooded with "bad" writing and "bad" scholarship?

We do not ask these questions simply for the sake of being antagonistic or provocative, but because we are informed by our experiences in another space of curation in academia: the classroom. As instructors, we were and are always in the process of curating. The construction of any syllabus demands a similar set of questions we ask ourselves when we discuss a submission: What is this piece attempting to convey? What will the reader understand about the fields and disciplines in question if they read this piece? If we have ten to fifteen weeks to operate as conduits between the pleasures and responsibilities of what we continue to learn and students at all different stages of their journey toward the same, who, and what, do we teach? Does the process of editing change if we think about it similarly: as the opportunity to curate a reading list for students, colleagues, friends?

Publishing this fall issue of *Lateral* is generative, as the bulk of production work takes place toward the end of a calendar year. It offers us the opportunity to look back over a longer stretch of time and consider if the curating we have done during the preceding twelve months "foster[ed] experimentation and collaboration among cultural studies practitioners and researchers < https://www.culturalstudiesassociation.org/about.html> ." As befitting our name, *Lateral* operates laterally: editorial decisions are made after all editors read all submitted manuscripts. We listen to each other attentively, consider and reconsider depending on the interpretations offered, seek out reviewers who we

believe would be thoughtful and ethical in their responses. There is no editor-in-chief or demarcation of seniority, no single opinion that overrides everyone else. Things can move faster at times, because there are many involved in the work; sometimes they move slower, because there are many involved in the work. But what is key, we believe, is that many are involved in the work. *Lateral* exists in the shape it does because the collective of editors is in relation to larger collectives of thinkers, because we belong to communities of readers and writers in cultural studies, performance studies, critical ethnic studies, feminist studies, queer studies, literary studies, philosophy, sociology, media studies—the list goes on and on.

This is not to glorify or romanticize our work: it's people on Zoom talking every month about deadlines, citations, and finding reviewers, among other mundane things. There is no compensation, financial or otherwise, provided by our respective places of work. We are constantly pulled in a myriad directions without pause, especially as an issue comes close to its publication date.

It is often quoted now, but its reach does not diminish its significance: "Our past is bleak. Our future dim. But I am not reasonable. A reasonable man adjusts to his environment. And unreasonable man does not. All progress, therefore, depends on the unreasonable man. I prefer not to adjust to my environment. I refuse the prison of 'I' and choose the open spaces of 'we.'"[1] And another: "'Whatever I am, whatever I can do, it's not enough,' he said. 'It's never enough,' Mead said. 'And what can anyone do alone?'"[2]

We at *Lateral* have spent the past year working in and toward that open space of "we," an open space that is much bigger than just our labor. We wish to thank those of you who are already there, and hope that others will join in 2026 and in years to come.

In This Issue

In “Spectacle, Surveillance, and Discipline: Synopticism at the Angola Prison Rodeo < https://csalateral.org/issue/14-2/spectacle-surveillance-discipline-synopticism-angola-prison-rodeo-mascarenhas/> ,” Daniella Mascarenhas challenges the expectant Foucauldian configuration of discipline and biopolitics. In her analysis, the Angola Prison Rodeo publicly stages inmate risk and bodily harm as entertainment, challenging the concealment of penal violence as the requisite modern means for institutional legitimacy. Using ethnographic data from 2023–24, the study shows that spectators read spectacle through both rodeo and rehabilitation narratives. This “re-normalizes” inmate suffering by recasting punishment as “disciplined,” redemptive fun. The particularities of Mascarenhas’s case illustrate how inmates seek financial gain and opportunities for self-representation, however their agency is tightly constrained by institutional approval and structural coercion, making participation a governed privilege. Additionally, the rodeo produces a synoptic surveillance dynamic—where the many watch the few—that complements internal panoptic control and expands it by recruiting the public as ideological validators, informal overseers, and financial supporters of the carceral state. Framed through both Gramscian hegemony (a state-based model) and Foucauldian discipline (a diffuse and ubiquitous socialization of power), and acknowledging limits and dissenting critiques, the article poses a theoretically original argument: that highly curated spectacles and the broadening of the synoptic scope helps to re-naturalize and re-modernize incarceration, expanding its cultural and economic reach.

Madhavi Reddi and Margaret E. Foster’s article, “Generationality, Desirability, and Redemption: How Aziz Ansari and Hasan Minhaj Articulate New Desi Masculinities in Stand-Up Comedy, < https://csalateral.org/issue/14-2/generationality-desirability-redemption-aziz-ansari-hasan-minhaj-new-desi-masculinities-stand-up-comedy-reddi-foster/> ” offers a sweeping conjunctural critique of the

seemingly progressive ways that South Asian masculinity is negotiated and asserted in the context of stand-up comedy. The article argues that stand-up comedy is a crucial arena where second-generation South Asian (Desi) men like Aziz Ansari and Hasan Minhaj construct identities and challenge stereotypes that render Desi masculinity either sexless or threatening. Despite their distinct celebrity personas—Ansari's "funny cute" and Minhaj's "principled family man"—both leverage the stage to seek cultural citizenship, critique white supremacy, and confront the interchangeability imposed by the white gaze. Their offstage scandals (Ansari's #MeToo accusation and Minhaj's alleged fabrication of racist incidents) threatened the authenticity of their onstage selves, making desirability, respectability, and trust central fault lines. Reddi and Foster argue that Ansari and Minhaj, by crafting successful comebacks, model a redemption arc that resists emasculated "model minority" scripts and advances a Model Man-adjacent Desi masculinity as a legitimate, culturally accepted form. The article, however, cautions that this redemption—and thus cultural citizenship—is facilitated by (requires in its negotiation and assertion) heteronormative, patriarchal norms, even as their careers help open space for multiple, evolving Desi masculinities in American comedy.

This issue also features the 2025 Randy Martin Prize essay, Josh Widera's "21st Century Sandwichmen: How Bicycle Couriers Contribute to Urban Food Delivery Platforms < https://csalateral.org/issue/14-2/21st-century-sandwichmen-how-bicycle-couriers-contribute-to-urban-food-delivery-platforms/> ." From ethnographic fieldwork, Widera builds a picture of the experience of a contract worker for DoorDash. By following this narrative with rich context through an exploration of the business model and history of food delivery, this article offers insights into the changing nature of twenty-first-century labor and exploitation.

Two new additions to Aporias < https://csalateral.org/archive/section/aporias/> take up timely questions in the field of cultural studies. Kevin Rigby Jr.'s "What Does Black Protest Appear to Be? < https://csalateral.org/section/aporias/what-

does-black-protest-appear-to-be-rigby-jr/> " examines the Black Lives Matter movement and the 2020 Minneapolis uprising as sites of rupture that expose the limits of visibility politics, rathern than assimilating black protest through narratives of vulnerability, loss, or redemptive spectacle. Rouzbeh Shadpey's "Negative Evidence: The Critical-Clinical Diagnosis of Fatigue in Copjec's Kiarostami < https://csalateral.org/section/aporias/negative-evidence-critical-clinical-diagnosis-fatigue-copjec-kiarostami-shadpey/> " theorizes fatigue and its impossible evidentary standards in clinical and critical contexts through Joan Copjec's essay "Battle Fatigue: Kiarostami and Capitalism" and Abbas Kiarostami's film *Taste of Cherry*.

The latest episode of the Positions < https://csalateral.org/archive/podcasts/positions/> features Delores Phillips and Cultural Studies Association's Crip Cultures/Critical Disability Studies Working Group Co-Host Theodora Danylevich in conversation with authors Alyson Patsavas, Alyson K. Spurgas, and Jess Whatcott on "Crip Silences, Crip Futurities, Crip Joy < https://csalateral.org/podcasts/positions/crip-silences-crip-futurities-crip-joy-phillips-patsavas-danylevich-spurgas-whatcott-carter/> ." This episode is accompanied by a scholarly commentary by Angela Carte

Finally, this issue includes a special section, Digital Platforms & Agency < https://csalateral.org/archive/section/digital-platforms-agency/> , edited by Reed Van Schenck and Elaine Venter, which situates platform studies within cultural studies, both analyzing platforms as artifacts and also seeking possibilities for disrupting their protocols. Through critical studies of Airbnb, TikTok, Instgram, digital voice assistants, dating apps, live-streaming, anti-botting, "alt-tech" social media, and facial recognition, this section interrogates the tendency to see platforms in post-racial, post-gender, and post-ability terms, instead returning attention to people and communities for whom these platforms were not design and yet whose agency interrupts these same platforms' hegemonic logics.

Notes

1. Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (Knoph: New York City, 2019. ↩

2. Ursula Le Guin, *Tales from Earthsea* (Clarion Books: New York City, 2012). ↩

Author Information

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Yumi Pak is a student, scholar, and instructor of Black literary and cultural studies, particularly within the overlaps and interstices between the United States, Scotland, and Jamaica. She is currently associate professor of Black Studies and affiliated faculty in English at Occidental College. From 2014–2022, she was assistant/associate professor of English at California State University, San Bernardino, where she also held an appointment as director of Ethnic Studies, a long-standing program on campus; in 2022, she co-founded the Department of Ethnic Studies at CSUSB. Her writing can be found in various publications, including *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, *ASAP/Journal*, *Women, Gender & Families of Color* and *Dismantle Magazine*.

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